

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY PRIORITY

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TAGS: PFOR, NI

SUBJECT: US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS ACTION MEMORANDUM
(S/S NO. 7603258)

- -

1. THE PROBLEM

FOLLOWING THE ATTEMPTED COUP IN NIGERIA ON FEBRUARY 13, THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT WILL BE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO ANY INDICATIONS THAT THE ATTEMPT HAS AFFECTED US ATTITUDES AND POLICIES TOWARDS NIGERIA.

2. BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

THE FEBRUARY 13 COUP FAILED, BUT THE NIGERIAN HEAD OF STATE, GENERAL MURTALA MUHAMMED, WAS KILLED AND REPLACED FEBRUARY 14 BY LT. GENERAL OLUSEGUN OBASANJO. OBASANJO IS A STRONG-WILLED PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER WHOSE THIRD MARINE DIVISION BROKE THROUGH-BIAFRAN DEFENSES AND ENDED THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR. HE IS BASICALLY PRO-AMERICAN BUT HE HAS BEEN CRITICAL OF US POLICY IN AFRICA AND REPORTEDLY

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BELIEVES THAT IN A SHOWDOWN THE US WOULD FAVOR SOUTH

AFRICA. HIS VIEWS UNDOUBTEDLY HAD A MAJOR INFLUENCE IN NIGERIA'S DECISION TO RECOGNIZE THE MPLA.

THE ATTEMPTED COUP WILL PROBABLY HAVE THREE EFFECTS ON NIGERIAN ATTITUDES:

--IT SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN ITS ABILITY TO QUELL FUTURE COUPS.

--IT SHOULD LEAD THE FMG TO TAKE ACTIONS THAT SHOW CONTINUITY AND CONSISTENCY WITH THE MUHAMMED GOVERNMENT.

--IT SHOULD MAKE THE GOVERNMENT PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO ANY EVIDENCE THAT POLICIES OR ATTITUDES OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS MAY CHANGE AS A RESULT OF THE COUP.

US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS ARE GOOD, DESPITE OUR DIFFERENCES OVER ANGOLA. WE ARE SEEKING WAYS TO STRENGTHEN THESE RELATIONS. UNDER SECRETARY ROBINSON IS STILL PLANNING TO VISIT NIGERIA FEBRUARY 23-25, AND YOU HAVE ASSURED THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT THAT YOU WILL VISIT LAGOS DURING YOUR TOUR OF AFRICA. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE SOME ALLEGATIONS THAT THE US WAS BEHIND THE COUP BECAUSE OF OUR WELL-PUBLICIZED DIFFERENCES WITH NIGERIA. MINOR DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT OUR EMBASSY IN LAGOS AND AT THE CONSULATE IN IBADAN.

SOLDIERS SHUT DOWN A TENNIS TOURNAMENT FEBRUARY 16 IN WHICH ARTHUR ASHE AND SEVERAL OTHER AMERICANS WERE PLAYING. THE AMERICAN ORGANIZERS OF THE TOURNAMENT AND THEIR NIGERIAN HOSTS HAD OBTAINED FMG PERMISSION TO PLAY THE TOURNAMENT DESPITE NATIONAL MOURNING FOR GEN. MUHAMMED, AND THE ARMY'S MOVE TO END THE TOURNAMENT WAS NOT DIRECTED AGAINST THE AMERICANS, BUT WE FEAR THAT NEWS OF THE INCIDENT MAY INCITE ANTI-AMERICAN OPINION.

UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS IMPORTANT TO GIVE THE NIGERIANS SOLID AND PUBLIC ASSURANCES THAT U.S. POLICIES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD NIGERIA HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED BY THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COUP.

3. THE OPTIONS

A. "BUSINESS AS USUAL". MAKE A CLEAR PUBLIC STATEMENT AT A HIGH LEVEL THAT THE U.S. CONTINUES TO ATTACH CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA, AND THAT IT DOES NOT INTEND TO LET AN

ATTEMPTED COUP INTERFERE WITH THE FURTHER STRENGTHENING OF THESE RELATIONS IN ALL FIELDS.

ADVANTAGES

--THE STATEMENT WOULD ALLAY ANY NIGERIAN FEARS THAT THE ATTEMPTED COUP HAS HAD AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS.

--THE STATEMENT WOULD HELP TO OFFSET ANY RUMORS OR ALLEGATIONS THAT THE US SUPPORTED THE COUP BECAUSE OF US-NIGERIAN DIFFERENCE OVER ANGOLA.

DISADVANTAGE

--THE STATEMENT MIGHT BE SEEN AS A BLAND AND WEAK COMMENTARY ON A TRAGIC AND PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO OVERTHROW A FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT IN A MAJOR DEVELOPING COUNTRY.

B. DO NOTHING. MAKE NO COMMENT AT A HIGHER LEVEL THAN THE DEPARTMENT'S PRESS OFFICER.

ADVANTAGE

WE WILL NOT APPEAR TO TAKE AN UNDUE INTEREST IN AN INTERNAL NIGERIAN AFFAIR.

DISADVANTAGE

IN VIEW OF YOUR ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO VISIT NIGERIA, AND THE INCREASED ATTENTION BEING DRAWN TO AFRICA BY ANGOLA, SILENCE IS MORE LIKELY TO BE MISINTERPRETED THAN A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STATEMENT.

C. CONDEMN COUP ATTEMPT. MAKE A STATEMENT AT A HIGH LEVEL SPECIFICALLY CONDEMNING THE COUP ATTEMPT.

ADVANTAGE

--WOULD EMPHASIZE OUR OPPOSITION TO VIOLENCE AS A MEANS OF POLITICAL CHANGE.

DISADVANTAGE

--COULD BE INTERPRETED AS US EFFORT TO "PROTEST TOO MUCH" AND THUS DRAW UNDUE ATTENTION TO ALLEGATIONS THAT THE US SUPPORTED THE COUP.

4. BUREAU VIEWS

AF PREFERS OPTION 1 ON THE GROUND THAT OUR RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA ARE SO IMPORTANT THAT WE CANNOT IGNORE AN ATTEMPT OF THIS KIND. OUR RELATIONS EXTEND ACROSS SO MANY FIELDS,

AND INVOLVE SO MANY MATTERS THAT ARE UNDER NEGOTIATION, ESPECIALLY IN THE COMMERCIAL AREA, THAT WE SHOULD APPEAR TO TAKE THE COUP ATTEMPT IN STRIDE AND EMPHASIZE "BUSINESS AS USUAL".

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT YOU TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO MAKE A STATEMENT FOR ATTRIBUTION ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES. YOU MAY FIND SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY TO MENTION THIS TO JOURNALISTS ON THE PLANE. IF YOU AGREE I SHALL FIND AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE SIMILAR STATEMENTS THIS WEEK.

--NIGERIA HAS RECOVERED FROM THE ATTEMPTED COUP IN A RAPID AND ORDERLY FASHION WHICH DEMONSTRATES THE VIABILITY OF NIGERIAN INSTITUTIONS.

--THE UNITED STATES CONTINUES TO ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH THIS IMPORTANT COUNTRY, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND DOES NOT INTEND TO ALLOW THE ATTEMPTED COUP TO AFFECT OUR POLICIES OR ATTITUDES TOWARD NIGERIA.

--FOR EXAMPLE, THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, MR. ROBINSON, INTENDS TO MAKE NO CHANGE IN HIS PLANS TO VISIT NIGERIA ON FEBRUARY 23-25. I LOOK FORWARD TO VISITING NIGERIA MYSELF IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE.

APPROVE DISAPPROVE

DRAFTED: AF/W:TWMSMITH APPROVED: AF:AMB SCHAUFLELE
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